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BLOG:

Zefi Kavvadia: No Country for Old Tweets

By Tommaso Campagna (<https://networkcultures.org/videovortex/author/tommaso/>), April 28, 2020 at 9:50 am.

An archivist's-in-training impressions of life in the times of social networks

By Zefi Kavvadia

I am (training to be) a (digital) archivist. Coming from a more "traditional" humanities background (literature and language studies), the importance of documenting and preserving was relatively given, even if seldom talked about. My literature and cultural studies seminars all revolved around and made use of heritage and memory material meticulously preserved and published by the archives, libraries, galleries, and museums of the world. Every once in a while we would look at something published on Scribd or a forum, or uploaded on YouTube (by a university or an established TV channel or so), but the vast majority of my syllabus expectedly derived from the canonized or canon-friendly corpus of human creativity – unfortunately there were to be no fringe LeftTube channels, no [shitposting](https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Shit%20Posting) (<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Shit%20Posting>) pages, no Snapchat art on that curriculum.

That reality of rarely having to think twice about the possibility of the precious cultural artifacts that I pored over being lost came in ironical contradiction to my own strong desire to save things that I considered important or intriguing. I cannot readily explain my adolescent self's desire to store and save stuff. It might have started as an amateur collector's tendency (stickers and stamps), but by the time I was a teenager with a computer and an internet connection, it had evolved into a full-blown foray into salvaging and keeping all the stuff I was interested in: copies of websites on Tolkien and His Dark Materials, JPEGs of funny cats ([https://www.lifewire.com/thmb/1p3mrM5_hSolFQJfH53VK1q4dvg=/768x0/filters:no_upscale\(\):max_bytes\(150000\):strip_icc\(\)/dicaprio3-583e33155f9b58d5b19e3a00.jpg](https://www.lifewire.com/thmb/1p3mrM5_hSolFQJfH53VK1q4dvg=/768x0/filters:no_upscale():max_bytes(150000):strip_icc()/dicaprio3-583e33155f9b58d5b19e3a00.jpg)) and favourite bands, ZIPs full of song lyrics in plain-text, collections of PDFs, you name it. The limits were only my hard drive's capacity which, in the mid-2000s, wasn't the greatest, yet I persisted. Lots of compressing and burning onto CDs and DVDs and losing and deleting and restoring from friends' copies ensued. It was truly an exciting time to be a data hoarder.



Years passed and my saviour complex subsided. The times were a'changin' and there was no need to store a Boromir GIF when you could instantly access countless versions of "One Does Not Just Walk Into Mordor" (https://miro.medium.com/max/1138/1*f4d2TNJNchKgbP97LzJLtA.jpeg) on 9GAG's mobile app. By the time I entered my 20s the migration of a great number of millennials from the almost DIY world of MySpace and MSN Messenger (<https://hips.hearstapps.com/digitalspyuk.cdnds.net/16/29/1469117487-messenger-nudge.gif>) to streamlined platforms like Facebook, Twitter, etc. was in full sway, and I would not be left behind. With the ease of posting, liking, and sharing, the fear of losing stuff became smaller and more meaningless. After all, a great portion of my everyday life was now spent online in a much more seamless way, without the breaks of AFK and BRB that were the norm a few years before. In a digital environment filled up with ubiquitous information, ephemerality slowly started turning into a virtue rather than a vice of the media that we created and consumed.

With most of my generation having spent all or part of our adolescence online, this was not an unwelcome turn of events, as who would want their embarrassing (https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjk_aH-LfkAhWQjQKHR5GCXUQjRx6BAgBEAQ&url=%2Furl%3Fsa%3Di%26rct%3Dj%26q%3D%26esrc%3Ds%26source%3Dimages%26cd%3D%26ved%3D9) emo poetry sticking to their online persona forever? The advent of social media networks and platforms like Instagram and Snapchat only strengthened our new-found infatuation with the present moment, and I can't blame us: the comforts some of us had taken for granted were being swept away and the precarity (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Precariat>) a lot of us were already experiencing was becoming the norm, in a world of economic crises, mass surveillance, wars, and ecological destruction. So why not enjoy ourselves in the here and now if it is all going to shambles anyway?

I cannot deny that that stance looked attractive to my young adult self for a little while; and yet, here I am a few years later advocating for the preservation of individual and collective memory, for community engagement with heritage, for ethical personal archiving, for a rethinking of what constitutes privacy vs. publicity, for the right to be forgotten and the right to be remembered, all at once and in contradistinction. The abandon with which some of the fluidity and fleetingness of the web is associated with does sometimes make me feel uncomfortable as an aspiring archivist, because the present historical moment seems to me to be one in which memory has the most potential to empower.

will make about which portions of online culture and life I will preserve, the formats and the platforms I will use to do so, will determine how our moment will look from the vantage point of the future. And while my instincts tell me to celebrate and embrace the liberating effects of the momentary, I also want to be able to continue doing what I do in good conscience.

And somehow, like this, I come almost full-circle back to my young collector self, but hopefully with some new insights offered by the joys of ephemerality that I experienced by existing online in the 2000s and 2010s. I want to be able to remember, and I want to be able to forget, and I now realize that archiving is about knowing how to apply integrity and empathy to both of these truly human capabilities.

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By Geert Lovink, April 28, 2020

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By Tommaso Campagna, April 26, 2020

Back when I was a little younger, in my early teens, I remembered how many of us from my generation, myself included, started "owning" or mostly likely borrowing our parents first wildly commercialized digital cameras and eventually found ourselves fantasizing in becoming photographers. Editing images, arranging or creating sets, modifying the colours on a computer, [...]

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